

-tion and deduction, and he used to electrify us students by the feats which he would perform. Frequently during the few seconds which would elapse between the patient entering the room and opening his mouth my professor would not only have diagnosed his disease, but would also have made up his mind as to the man's place of birth, his age, his trade and his personal habits. His mode of walking, his scarf-pin, his watch-charms, his fingers, his trouser-knees, his boots, his tattoo marks, they were all swept in at a glance, and their probable meaning drawn from them. The effect was so striking that I have often seen the patient stare round him in bewilderment. "This is a Lanarkshire man" the Professor would say "It is clear from his palm that he has done some shoe making and from his stride that he has served in a cavalry regiment. The knees of his trousers and his right forefinger show that he now earns his living as a tailor." Ofcourse he was not always right, but it was surprisingly seldom that he was wrong. My mind as you may suppose, naturally turned to him when I tried to build up a semi-scientific system of detection.

And then ofcourse there is Poe's Monsieur Dupin, who must be the father, and a hundredfold the superior of every detective in literature. His system of reasoning was so exactly analogous to that which I had seen in actual daily practise with my old Professor, that it is impossible for me to separate the two influences. But Monsieur Dupin is so masterly that he must affect the



reader who comes in contact with him-- and certainly it was Poe also who first showed the possibilities of the detective tale, how it might go to the extreme of sensation and yet preserve a claim to be Literature.

As to Holmes' methods perhaps the simpler way would be to read a short extract which shows them in operation. He has been talking about what may be deduced from the commonest object. Watson, his friend, in order to test him hands him the watch of his dead brother.

Sign of Four. P. 13 to P.20

This is ofcourse only a small matter but it indicates the method. A more finished example is where Sherlock Holmes sits with his equally observant brother Mycroft Holmes at a club window and deduces the histories of the passers by. Mycroft Holmes was too fat to get about, you know, but his reasoning faculty was superior to his brother's and Sherlock consulted him occasionally when he got cornered. This shows the two men.

Greek Interpreter. P.204 (Am.Ed.)

Ofcourse as you perceive it is all superficial enough, and yet it is not quite so superficial as some critics have claimed. It is always easy to see how a thing is done after it is explained. To take an example which was omitted in publication Watson on one occasion finds a plug of tobacco from a pipe near the scene of a crime. He holds it up and says "Here is a plug of tobacco." Holmes



instantly replies "And from a meerschaum pipe too." You can test how obvious Holmes' deductions are, by each deducing that for yourselves.

I have been considerably bothered by people confusing me with my imaginary character, and expecting me to know all about them by glancing at their waistcoat buttons. Now I cannot claim myself to be at all a sharp or observant man. On the contrary I should say that I was absent-minded save when my attention was aroused. The most that I can do is by a mental effort to put myself inside the skin of a very sharp man, and look at the world for a limited time through his eyes. That is all very well in a story but it might not be so effective in real life. After these stories I was deluged with letters from people all over the world who had mysteries which they wanted me to look into. I had no idea there were so many mysteries in existence. I refused to take any of them in hand however, and I do not suppose that their solution has been seriously delayed through that. ①

① + Well as you know, or as you may not know, Mr. Holmes came to grief at last, and met with his end when he was opposed to a criminal as determined as himself. I think it was as well. He had been imposed long enough-- too long perhaps-- upon the good nature of the public. ~~It is a pity to~~ It is a pity to outstay one's welcome and twenty-six stories about one man are as much as even the most good-natured can be asked to stand. And yet

it was only after Holmes' death that I realised what warm friends he had among the reading public. I assure that if I had slain a living human being I could not have had more bitter letters and more personal abuse than when I brought his career to a sudden end. He was so very real to some people that I had letters asking for a lock of his hair, and for photographs of him at different ages.

X These detective stories arose then, as I explain to you half in joke and half in experiment at first, and then I was drawn on from one to another, until I brought them to this abrupt end. As a matter of fact my heart was never in it and I had very different views about literature. Historical romance was the field which attracted me, and when I found myself drifting away into this other work I felt as a young artist might who had an ambition to exhibit in oils at the American Academy, but who found his sketches in a comic journal more popular with the public. Even if his sketches ~~are~~ are better than his oils he still longs to follow his own natural bent.

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